




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

 The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program is all about kids – high school dropouts – getting a second chance to become responsible, productive citizens. It is about these young people realizing that they can learn, that they can be leaders, that they can become physically fit and that they can start and finish something successfully – many of them for the first time. It is about parents and guardians seeking and finding help in the daunting task of guiding teenagers into adulthood in environments where negative choices are aplenty. It is about the taxpayers' willingness to have their tax dollars used to save a youth from imprisonment rather than paying a higher tab for incarceration.

In November 1991, Congress appropriated \$2 million to plan for two six-month residential pilot programs to be designed and operated by the National Guard. The goal of the pilot programs was to find a way to help unemployed U.S. high school dropouts re-enter mainstream society as skilled, involved members of their communities via educational and community service opportunities. The pilot programs began in early 1993 at Na-



tional Guard sites in Oklahoma and West Virginia. Today, there are 31 ChalleNGe program sites in 26 States and Puerto Rico. This report provides an independent assessment of the activities, impacts and outcomes of the program during the period October 2001 and September 2002.

While this report covers most of fiscal year 2002 (FY 02), funding used to support these activities was appropriated in fiscal year 2001. This time interval between appropriations and operations is necessary to accommodate the differences in State and Federal fiscal years, differences in the convening times of State Legislatures and to allow for Cooperative Agreement negotiations between the National Guard Bureau (NGB) and each State.

The strategic concept that inspired ChalleNGe – the use of military values to rescue at-risk youth – has shown over the years the program has been in existence to benefit the economy, promote healthy communities and contribute to the national defense. ChalleNGe uses a military model for organization and discipline, but it is not a “boot camp.” Rather, it is a voluntary educational program that stresses academic preparation, leadership development, mentoring, physical fitness and post-graduate placement in jobs, continued education and/or the military.

The program consists of a five-month Residential Phase, usually conducted on a National Guard facility, followed by a 12-



month Post-Residential Mentoring Phase. During the Residential Phase, participants are exposed to an intervention model that seeks to foster the holistic development of the participants (called corpsmembers) by weaving together the values of citizenship, community, academics, the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership and personal growth and development. During the Post-Residential Phase, the graduates apply the learned values to the lifestyle changes they have adopted while pursuing their goals and aspirations. A mentor of their choice is there to assist and guide them on their journey.

This report focuses on the two Residential Phase classes conducted during the reporting period and the two Post-Residential classes for which the ChalleNGe program sites completed their 12 months of monitoring activities. Major outcomes are listed below. In-depth analysis of performance against goals, objectives and standards is presented within the report along with recommendations for program enhancements.

Program Administration



- ★ Federal funding for ChalleNGe for this reporting year was \$62.5 million dollars. The Federal-State share for operating the program was 60% Federal and 40% State.
- ★ The Adjutants General and United States Property and Fiscal Officers in each State increased the intensity of their over-



“Please tell Lt. Simms, Sgt. Magee, Sgt. Smith, Sgt. Davis and Sgt. Gilbert that I want to thank them. These five men talked to me a lot. They pushed me really hard to do my best. I really appreciate everything you all did for me.”

*-- Pvt. Dwayne Pierce,
Ft. Knox, KY*

sight of program resources, thereby assuring a higher level of confidence in their management and accountability.

- ★ The National Guard Bureau developed and published a Strategic Plan for the ChalleNGe Program. This landmark visionary document is the result of an organization-wide study that evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the program, searched out trends that will influence it in the future, identified critical issues and devised strategies to get through trouble spots over the next five years.
- ★ The National Guard men and women who make up most of the staff of ChalleNGe programs and are responsible for training, teaching, coaching, advising and counseling the Corpsmembers are first-class role models. They are a positive force in bringing about changes in attitudes, values and lifestyles. When combined with the roles that other members of the National Guard play in supporting the program throughout the States, this unique team of our Nation’s most respected professionals are protecting America’s future (our young people) and strengthening communities one youth at a time.
- ★ A total of 19,784 youth applied for admission to the two residential classes, and 11, 231 youth were invited to register. Of



this number, 8,935 were initially enrolled against a target enrollment (budgeted) of 7,124. A total of 6,903 (97% of the target enrollment) young men and women completed all program requirements, graduated, and are now applying the new values and skills they acquired from the program in their communities, in education programs, the military and the workplace.

- ★ The funding per Corpsmember was \$14,459.

Academic Accomplishments



- ★ A total of 71.5% of the Corpsmembers who took the GED test received their General Education Development Diploma.
- ★ Program graduates achieved an average 1.9 grade level equivalency growth in Mathematics and an average 1.6 grade level equivalency growth in Reading.

Community Service



- ★ Corpsmembers performed 649,914 hours of community service during the Residential Phase. This represents \$3,347,057 in direct value provided to the communities in close proximity to the ChalleNGe sites.



Leadership★

- ★ A total of 92% of the graduates had an opportunity to serve in a leadership position either in the program organization structure or in an elected position in the student government.

Physical Fitness★

- ★ Overall, 98.5% of the graduates earned a physical fitness award during the Residential Phase. Fifteen percent of the graduates earned more than one award.

Placements★

- ★ Just over half, 53%, of the graduates that were placed within 30 days after graduation were in continuing education programs (college, vocational training programs or had returned to high school). Twenty-three percent joined the military and 24% found jobs.

Recommendations★

- ★ The ChalleNGe Strategic Plan provides a pathway for the future development of the program. The National Guard Bureau should make every effort to ensure that there is consistent follow-up, assessment and measurement of the attainment of the goals and objectives laid out in the plan. Where necessary, strategies should be modified and goals should be updated as changes in the operating environment dictate.



★ ChalleNGe is starting its 10th year of operation. The National Guard Bureau should conduct a comprehensive appraisal of each of the program constructs with the goal of increasing standardization, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness and achieving even greater impact for the communities, States and the Nation.

★ Adjutants General have increased their vigilance over the management of program resources. The economic times indicate that they must continue to closely monitor program activities to ensure that the outcomes and their value to the community and the State justify the taxpayers' investment.

★ ChalleNGe site directors should continue to review and analyze their program's performance in meeting established standards. Every young person who enters their program should be given every opportunity to fully and completely participate and self-actualize in each program component. Additionally, more use of information technology and a renewed focus on the job skills component, placements and Post-Residential follow-up can demonstrate greater impact of the value of the program to the Corpsmembers, their families and the communities as a whole.

From a concept to provide young people an opportunity to leave an environment that in many cases directly contributed



"I want to thank Mr. Steve Cucello, my son's teacher; Ms. Karen Parker, my son's counselor and all the cadre at Youth ChalleNGe for their hard work. The job they do is fantastic. They make a major difference in a person's life. Please let them know how grateful I am."

*-- ChalleNGe Corpsmember
Parent*

to their failure to continue school to a visionary effort to use the National Guard to restructure the lives of American youth and unleash their potential to benefit themselves and the Nation, ChalleNGe is proving its value. Programs now exist in 26 States and Puerto Rico, providing that opportunity to more than 7,000 youth annually.

The men and women of the National Guard who oversee, manage and provide the day-to-day and hour-by-hour supervision are making a difference. They are helping young Americans secure their future and succeed as educated, trained responsible citizens.